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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the nature of a sixth-grade community of readers from the emic perspective (participants' point of view). A qualitative interpretive case study was conducted in one sixth-grade language arts classroom with the researcher acting as participant-observer. Data in the form of fieldnotes, interviews, and written samples of children's work were collected and analyzed using the constant comparative method. Results indicated that in this setting children define themselves as readers in four emic categories: they define and delineate among texts uniquely; and they interact and respond to texts and other readers at home and in four socially constructed school contexts: "silent" reading, book selection, writing, and aesthetic activity. An emerging grounded theory of the nature of this community of readers was formulated: (1) children's perceptions of themselves as readers and their preferences for and definitions of texts were influenced by interactions with books and peers in home and school contexts; (2) children interacted with books and peers, socially constructing contexts for responding to books; and (3) children formed a community within which they interacted in the contexts they created--children's interactions shaped the community, influenced perceptions/concepts of themselves as readers, the construction of text meanings, and the nature of their responses to books. (Contains 64 references, 5 tables of data, and a figure representing the community of readers.) (Author/RS)

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Readers, Texts, and Contexts in a Sixth-Grade Community of Readers

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Running Head: COMMUNITY OF READERS

Readers, Texts, and Contexts in a Sixth-Grade Community of Readers

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of a sixth-grade community of readers from the emic perspective (participants' point of view). A qualitative interpretive case study was conducted in one sixth-grade language arts classroom with the researcher acting as a participant-observer. Data in the form of fieldnotes, interviews, and written samples of children's work were collected and analyzed using the constant comparison method (a qualitative research approach by in which data collection and analysis are simultaneously conducted, interrelated, constantly compared, with the goal of conceptually-dense, grounded theory). Results of the study indicated that in this setting children define themselves as readers in four emic categories; they define and delineate among texts uniquely; and they interact and respond to texts and other readers at home and in four socially-constructed school contexts: "silent" reading, book selection, writing, and aesthetic activity. An emerging grounded theory (findings grounded data and in the context of the study) of the nature of this community of readers was formulated from the results of the study: 1). Children's perceptions of themselves as readers and their preferences for and definitions of texts were influenced by interactions with books and peers in home and school contexts. 2). Children interacted with books and peers, socially constructing contexts for responding to books. 3). Children formed a community within which they interacted in the contexts they created; children's interactions shaped the community, influenced perceptions/concepts of themselves as readers, the construction of text meanings, and the nature of their responses to books.

Readers, Texts, and Contexts in a Sixth-Grade Community of Readers

INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years there has been a great deal of interest in children's responses to literature. However, I wonder about the complexity of readers' responses to literature and if we can really observe the emotional and mental activity that occurs when readers connect with texts. I believe that readers' responses to literature encompass many complex physical, cognitive, emotional, and social interpretations that are often intertwined and difficult to observe as a researcher. However intriguing, magical, and momentary a response may be, I was challenged to do research in this area by the thought that readers' responses may represent the essence of what makes us readers. As I thought about studying children reading and writing in classrooms, I wondered what children thought about themselves as readers, about texts, and about the contexts in which they read and write, and decided that this was to be what I would investigate. In the following passages, I present research and theory that influenced the planning and shaped my analysis of this study. Subsequent sections of this paper include a presentation of the research methodology and findings, followed by conclusions and interpretations and a discussion of this study.

Theoretical Background of the Study:
Readers and Texts in Contexts

This study was inspired by the work of Galda who suggests response to literature be considered holistically (1988); that is, in the teaching of literature, readers, texts, and contexts should be equally important. I wondered if this could be applied to research in response to literature. There seemed to be a need for a holistic investigation of the construction of

the contexts for reading and responding and the roles of readers and texts in those contexts.

During the planning stages of this study, I first began thinking about my views of reality, and although I characterize this study as a study of response to literature, it was shaped first by the concept of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1978; Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism, characterized by a concern for understanding how individuals interact with others in social organizations to form meanings, acted as a theoretical umbrella for the study giving me a base from which to plan and implement the research. Symbolic interactionism is concisely summarized by Patton as:

> It is a perspective that places great emphasis on the importance of meaning and interpretation as essential human processes in reaction against behaviorism and mechanical stimulus-response psychology. People create shared meanings through their interactions, and those meanings become their reality. Blumer articulated three major premises as fundamental to symbolic interactionism: 1). Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. 2). The meaning of things arises out of the social interaction one has with one's fellows. 3). The meanings of things are handled in and modified through and interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things he encounters. (1990, pp. 75-76)

As I read the works of Blumer and others, I began thinking of symbolic interactionism as a theoretical base that may account for the social construction of children's concepts about themselves as readers, their concepts about texts, and their role in the construction of contexts in

classrooms. Theoretically, it seemed to me that readers interact with texts and other readers to create meanings of and about themselves as readers. Talk among readers about texts, in turn, shapes children's concepts about books. The interpretation of texts becomes, under symbolic interactionism, a social act, an interpretive act, shaped by interactions among readers. Further, symbolic interactionism could account for "realities" created through social interaction; classroom contexts for reading and writing, thus could be, theoretically, realities shaped by children's interactions. I believe that these ideas are not new, but rather have been written about by theorists and researchers with different words, under the broad term response to literature which focuses on the role/s of readers, texts, and contexts in the interpretation of literature. For the purposes of planning and implementing this study, I considered the role/s of the readers, texts, and contexts within the classroom community. In the following passages, I present the relevant theory and research that shaped the study's analysis in three sections: Readers, Texts, and Contexts.

Readers

Traditionally, the reader has been viewed as a decoder of symbols. Recently, the constructive role of the reader has been addressed by many (e.g., Bleich 1975, 1978; Fish, 1980; Holland, 1975; Iser, 1978). However, the writings of Rosenblatt best explain how I viewed readers as I planned and conducted the study. Readers, according to Rosenblatt (1978), actively interpret and respond to literature, bringing personalities and experiences to the text. Each reading is a new experience for the reader, an "...evocation of a poem...an event in time...not an object or an ideal entity" (p. 12). Rosenblatt's "poem" is evoked by the reader during "transactions" with

literary texts. Through transactions with texts readers construct personal poems with texts; the unique nature of the "poem" reflects the individual nature of the reader. The reader's personality, experiences, and concept of him/herself as a reader are shaped by social interaction. Thus, the reader's concept of him/herself as a reader in turn, influences his/her response or "poem."

Much of the research in response to literature that pertains to reader factors is based on the idea that the reader plays an important role in the act of interpretation. Although developmental trends in children's responses to literature have been well-documented by researchers (e.g., Applebee, 1978; Odell & Cooper, 1976), Galda (1988) indicates reader factors include much more, "... background and experience... personality...text preferences, expectations for reading, ...past literary experiences..." (pp. 96-97). As I thought about children reading in classrooms, I wondered what they thought of themselves as readers and if this affected their responses.

There are few, recent studies of readers' self-perceptions. The majority of these fall in the category of reader autobiographies. Three comprehensive self-reported reader autobiographies have been recently conducted (Cope, 1990; Sherrill, 1981; Shiring, 1986). Typically, in these studies high school and/or college age students are asked to write reading autobiographies that are then analyzed qualitatively to determine home and school factors that influence the development of avid, lukewarm, and nonreaders. These autobiographical retrospective studies of readers tell us that both home and school factors affect reading ability and attitudes toward reading. These studies are not, however, generally considered part of the realm of response to literature.

If reader factors do indeed influence the ways in which children interpret texts, or respond to texts, then logically it would seem that their self-perceptions would play an important role in the construction of text meanings. There is little research from a response to literature stance that investigates reader self-perceptions and the influence of those self-perceptions on text selections, interactions, and responses to literature. Martinez and Roser comment on the state of research in reader factors:

> Despite the increased attention to the reader-responder, research in this area is in its infancy. The major thrust of investigations of children's responses has been on a single reader characteristic, that of age and how responses to literature change across age levels. (1991, p. 644).

Texts

If Galda's (1988) suggestions concerning holistic teaching be adhered to in studies of response to literature, texts too should be considered. Purves (1985) explains the role of texts in the contexts of readers and writers, "...texts...help produce readers who read texts in a particular way. Texts also help produce 'communities' of readers and writers" (p. 60). Features inherent in texts influence readers' responses to literature. "Poems" may be shaped by aspects of style and characterization, age and maturation level of main characters, and genre (Galda, 1988). For the purposes of definition and theoretical connection to symbolic interactionism, texts are not singular entities, but rather exist because they are a part of a community of readers. If texts have significance for readers, readers must make texts part of their community of readers by constructing their meaning and significance through social interaction. Further, if texts are shaped by

communities of readers, then any given text may be both part of and apart from a group of readers and exists as a physical object made live by readers. The significance (and perhaps existence) of text is too, socially constructed through interaction with readers involved in the processes of interpretation.

Influences of text features on the nature of responses to literature seems too to be in its beginning stages of research and has been investigated in two general ways. Through studies of children's text preferences (e.g., Mellon, 1987; Purves & Beach, 1972; Tucker, 1976, 1981) we have learned of the developmental and gender-specific patterns of text preferences of school-age children. Studies such as these tell us that students in the middle grades generally read for pleasure (Purves & Beach, 1972). Females of this age seem to prefer reading romances and mysteries, and males of this age seem to prefer reading science fiction, sports stories, and adventure stories. A second line of research investigates the influence of specific text features on responses to literature. Studies of the influence of text features upon responses to literature are generally explored in the context of larger studies (e.g., Eeds & Wells, 1989; Galda, 1982; Lehr, 1988). Eeds and Wells investigated the effects of literature discussion groups on children's response to literature and determined that provocative texts have the potential for creating rich discussions among children. Galda considered genre and topic when she studied three fifth grade girls' responses. She determined that the structure of the text had an effect on the girls' responses. Lehr investigated children's responses to theme and found that genre had an effect on the ability of children from kindergarten, second, and fourth grades to find and summarize themes from folktales and realistic stories. These studies help us understand the influence of specific text features on the nature of children's responses.

Contexts

The study of classroom context is a somewhat recent development in education. Green and Weade (1987) define contexts as social, linguistic, and cognitive constructions that are

> ...product[s] of social interaction, in which social, academic, and activity structures influence and/or support one another...are not given in the setting..can overlap...can co-occur...may transcend events...are dynamic and evolving phenomena. (p. 8)

Contexts for response to literature seem to be similar: products of social interaction, dynamic, and evolving. Fish (1980) describes contexts as "interpretive communities" that act as boundaries in which meaning is constructed by readers and writers. Bleich (1975; 1978) and Hepler and Hickman (1982) described "communities of readers" by theoretically connecting the world of schools and children to Fish's idea of the interpretive community. This theoretical connection suggested for the first time that children too may be members of interpretive communities and/or communities of readers. This implies that young readers are not isolated in their interpretive tasks, but rather, make meaning in socially-constructed contexts. The concept of a community of readers considered in light of symbolic interactionism suggests a created reality where interaction among children shapes the conditions under which they read, respond, and write.

A third area of research on response to literature has focused on the influence of context factors on children's responses to literature. Recently, classroom-based research investigating children's natural responses to literature has suggested the importance of context. Research indicates that young readers' responses to literature are influenced by social settings and

occur in classroom contexts (e.g., Hepler & Hickman, 1982; Hickman, 1981; McClure, 1985; Pillar, 1983).

Studies of context factors reveal much about the social aspects of responses to literature in classrooms. Hickman (1981) was one of the first to study children's natural responses as they read in classrooms. By conducting a qualitative study of children's responses, she determined that young readers' responses to literature were influenced by context. Hepler and Hickman (1982) determined that talk helped readers in their study construct meaning. Middle school readers in their study used opportunities to interact in order to share information about text selection and construct text meaning. Similarly, Eeds and Wells (1989) concluded that the fifth-graders in their ethnographic study utilized opportunities for interaction to construct meaning in literature groups. Literature discussion groups became, for the readers in this study, community sharing and questioning groups where children questioned what they had read and expressed opinions about authors. Literature discussion groups in Eeds and Wells' study were spatial and temporal structures for "grand conversations" among the readers. McClure (1985) also found that context factors influenced intermediate students' responses to literature. In a qualitative study of poetry responses, McClure noted that stable reading and writing peer groups, formed by the children, became community support groups. Young readers in McClure's study gave peers suggestions for topic selection and revision ideas during writing. They helped one another clarify text meanings and acted as audiences and support groups. According to McClure, contextual factors greatly influenced the learning and responses of the children in the classroom she studied. Hepler (1991) terms these types of interactions among children concerning literature

as "the information network in the community of readers' (p. 180).

This body of research indicates that children respond to one another as readers and writers in the context of the classroom. Interaction among readers and writers in classrooms seems to enhance the readers' responses. However, within the classroom there may be specific contexts that influence children's responses, in different ways, to the same book. The effects of reader factors, text factors, and context factors on children's responses to literature in the classroom have been well established. However, the links between these factors have not been holistically investigated from the point of view of the children. Further, nor has the nature of children's perceptions of themselves as readers, how they define and delineate among texts, and how children shape classroom/community contexts been investigated holistically. This study attempts to link the factors of reader, text, and context by studying the effects and consequences of children's perceptions of themselves as readers on their text preferences and oral and written responses in classroom contexts.

METHOD

Overview of the Study

In order to investigate and describe what children thought about themselves as readers, about texts, and about the contexts in which they read and write, I decided that my primary research goal was to study and describe a group of children reading and writing from the "emic perspective" (Geertz, 1973; Pike, 1967; Spindler, 1982, 1988). I use the term "emic" as it has been popularized in educational research by Spindler, "...the view from within the culture, the folkview, in terms of native categories" (1982, 1988, p. 7). Describing a situation from the emic perspective is difficult at best. So

that I might do this, I immersed myself in the classroom community to obtain and describe "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1973). I developed the role of participant-observer (Gold, 1958) by following the social/classroom rules that governed the children and by assuming the role of participant as helper or quasi-friend (Fine & Glasser, 1970; Mercurio, 1972).

Participants

The 21 sixth-graders who participated in the study were enrolled in a small, private school in Athens, Georgia and were members of the same homeroom and language arts class. Of the 21, eight were females, and 13 were males ranging in age from 11 to 13 years old. All of the participants with the exception of one child of Indian descent, were white, middle-class children.

Establishing rapport with the children was critical. How could I describe anything from their perspective without their trust? The children often tested to see if they could trust me. For example, when the teacher left the room and children violated classroom rules, they cautiously observed to see if I informed the teacher. I never did, and over time they allowed me to see and hear more of them. I knew that I was truly a participant-observer on the day in the second month of the study when I was hit by a pillow during a pillow fight and no one noticed or commented.

Establishing rapport with the teacher was also critical. The role of the teacher in the study changed as the study progressed. I invited her to become a co-researcher. I encouraged Ms. Reynolds to play an active role in the research by participating as both a informant and a researcher. She did not agree to become a co-researcher. However, throughout the course of the study, I shared my fieldnotes and other data with her weekly and asked her for comments and criticisms. For the first few weeks of the study, she commented

on the revealing nature of the data and how interesting the study was to her. However, as the study continued Ms. Reynolds became more reluctant to share information about the children, her teaching, or her impressions of my presence in her classroom. Unfortunately, I believe that despite my efforts, I never established any rapport beyond polite niceties with Ms. Reynolds. Thus, although Ms. Reynolds certainly played an important role in the classroom and affected the results of the study, she was not really a participant in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The study began in November of 1990 when the children started the class reading of The outsiders (Hinton, 1967), continued through the course of a Greek mythology unit, and ended in March of 1991 when the children finished reading the novel A day no pigs would die (Peck, 1972). Data collection and analysis procedures were conducted in three phases (unrelated to the instructional units) and followed the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which data collection and analysis were ongoing and interrelated.

I began phase one in late November of 1990; my purpose was to find out how the children conceived of reading and writing and their perceptions of and roles in the language arts block. Data in the form of participant-observer fieldnotes, children's writing and response journals, audiotapes of class discussions, and informal interviews were collected on 31 separate visits, each averaging one and one half hour. Fieldnotes were typed in dated Word Perfect 5.0 (1989) macro files and printed with line numbers and wide left margins for coding. From the first day of the study I began "open coding" (generating/modifying a series of codes based on the data and coding data

according to the generated codes) of the fieldnotes and copies of children's written work. I wrote memos so that I would remember my thoughts as I reread and analyzed data; these memos shaped the focus of data collection. Thus, I could see congruency between my analytic and theoretical memos and the focus of my data collection and analysis--an critical element of constant comparison analysis.

From this analysis I determined that the majority of the emerging codes grouped under the core categories of reader, text, and context. This lead me to determine that reader-response theory explained the majority of the themes and categories that emerged from the data. I then began to analyze data hierarchically following Glaser and Strauss's suggestions for graphic representations of data and began considering data as conditional, interactional, strategic, and consequential and coding it as such. These acts of analyses lead me to the conclusion that "context" was my study's major core category because context was ever present in the data and influenced what was observed and coded under the core categories of reader and text. I tested this emerging theory by drawing a series of models representing the elements of the community's contexts for reading. To test my models, I re-coded and placed all of my data from the fieldnotes in four contexts files organized chronologically by context and topic. I then coded the context files hierarchically and cut them (by hand and on the computer) into stacks of specific categories that represented the perspectives of the children. After several revisions of my model and my analyses of the context files of fieldnotes and children's written work, I began to see patterns among the contexts that were subtly, but distinctly different. I determined that I had reached data saturation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) of phase one of the study and

began the second phase of the study in February of 1991.

During phase two I concentrated on further exploring emerging themes and categories from the point of view of the children by selecting a group of children who represented the class as a whole. I began this phase of the study by interviewing the 21 children in the classroom. I wrote questions for the interview guides based on my analysis during phase one. Taking care not lead them, I asked the children these questions in the following order: to tell me about a book they were reading, to describe language arts, and to tell me about themselves as a reader. The interviews were transcribed and coded using the categories that emerged from phase one's analysis with a focus on the children's concepts of themselves as readers, texts, and contexts. I selected four females and four males and chose to characterize these eight children as "example case readers." I interviewed the mothers (fathers were invited but did not agree to be interviewed) of example case readers because I wanted to investigate home and community as a context that influenced the children. I asked them questions that paralleled the student interviews: to tell me about books the children were reading, to describe their child's language arts experiences, and to tell me about their child as a reader. I tape recorded and transcribed our interviews. I coded the interview transcripts of children and parents using the same hierarchy of emerging codes.

The final phase of the study consisted of a return to the classroom to validate the emerging grounded theory (a methodology for generating substantive theory that is based on data and emerges from data, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I searched for discrepant cases, attempted to disprove my model, and developed and refined my emerging grounded theory. This phase of

the study consisted of 16 one and one-half hour sessions of classroom observation and data collection following the same procedures as in phase one of the study. During this final phase of the study, I concentrated my data collection and analysis on the eight example case readers. Results and conclusions are reported on fully in

In the following passages I present findings that represent a rephrasing of the study's initial analysis in which I more directly propose symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework for explaining social interactions among the children and their responses to books and peers.

FINDINGS

Summary of Children's Perceptions of Reader, Text, and Context

The analysis of the study's data yielded findings concerning how children perceived themselves as readers, how they defined texts, and how they shaped classroom contexts. Findings from the study are presented in the following passages and taken from the core categories: READERS, TEXTS, and CONTEXTS.

These children interacted often with one another and texts at home and school. Through rich experiences with books and peer readers, children in the study developed concepts of themselves as readers that emerged in four emic categories: 1.) Not a Good Reader/Doesn't Like to Read; 2.) Pretty Good Reader/Sometimes Likes to Read; 3.) Pretty Good Reader/Likes to Read; 4.) Good Reader/Likes to Read. In interviews, the children supported their perceptions of themselves as readers by referring to the rate and/or the amount that they read. Children's definitions of self as reader were also connected to the children's perceptions of texts and to specific texts or genres.

Children in the study used their own definitions of genre and text-type to discuss their preferences for books. For example, a "good book" meant several different things to the readers. For some children a good book was a short book, or a long book, or an adventure story, or a mystery, or a book that was "like me." Throughout the study, the children used the term "good book" to describe their text preferences, select books for reading, and talk about books.

The children and the teacher played important roles in shaping classroom contexts for reading and writing. During the language arts block, Ms. Reynolds assigned various integrated, process-oriented reading and writing assignments. Ms. Reynolds encouraged her students to follow all steps of the writing process in linear order each time they wrote. Except when holding peer writing conferences, children in this classroom were not allowed to talk among themselves. Talk for the sake of selecting topics for writing, for discussing books and authors, for sharing texts, and for sharing process was not allowed. The children were aware of this rule. Erin told me that she talks about books "whenever Ms. Reynolds is not around." Tyler expressed his frustration at not being able to talk during topic selection,

> ...and writing you can't even talk about your ideas. You can only write and the only way you can talk about your ideas is in a conference, but you can't really do that because you've already written down your first draft...sometimes you are stuck and you don't know what you should write about, and she won't let you talk until you have a first draft done. (Interview, 2/6)

Children did talk during language arts. The children perceived themselves as members of a community and enjoyed those events, such as reading books in common, that promoted this community feeling among themselves. Two children referred to this:

PETER: I like it when we read books in the class. Like when we read this one and this one [shows me books on the shelf]. (Interview, 2/5)

LYNN:...I like reading, like when we're reading in classes. I like reading out of books, like, what we're doing as a class..like when she [Ms. Reynolds] reads them out or we read them all together. (Interview, 2/20)

Children's talk occurred in patterns specific to unassigned tasks of reading and writing. Through their interactions, children shaped four distinct classroom contexts for responding to books and one another: "silent" reading, book selection, writing, and aesthetic activity. Although these contexts for reading and writing were framed by the teacher's assignments, they were shaped primarily by the children's supportive talk that occurred as they read and wrote.

Contexts of a Community of Readers

Children's talk occurred in patterns. These four patterns of talk revolved around four contexts for responding to books and one another during language arts. The context-specific patterns of interaction represent a summary of the analysis of "context" as a core category and are presented in Table 1 below.

Insert Table 1 about here

Talk that occurred in the four school contexts was purposeful and related specifically to the instructional tasks that framed the contexts; children talked among themselves as they read, selected books, wrote, and planned and presented aesthetic activities. At first glance it may seem that these contexts were mere blocks of time set aside during the language arts period. This was not the case; the contexts overlapped one another. For example, as

children wrote, they often paused to read silently, or share ideas for book selection, or play with words as they did during aesthetic activities. A final product (such as a finished book, a final copy, a book selection, or an artistic response) was the end result of talk and tasks occurring within the four contexts. It was the social construction of tasks and talk that occurred around those tasks that made these contexts categorically different; these are presented in Tables 2 through 5.

"Silent" Reading

Children in the study were given many opportunities for "silent" reading. At first glance, this seemed to be merely a block of time set aside daily for reading. However, "silent" reading occurred throughout the day in the classroom, in the library, at recess, and at lunch. Children were not supposed to talk when they read. However, they did talk as they read, and they employed particular tasks to complete a text. Table 2 presents tasks and talk around silent reading.

Insert Table 2 about here

As children read assigned texts, read books with friends, read books they had chosen, and reread books, they talked briefly and furtively about books and their reading processes. There were subtle differences in their talk related to the specific task. For example, as children read assigned texts, they raced and spent much of their time talking about how far along in the book they were; talk often began with the phrase, "I'm on page.... Although they did compare progress at other times, the children talked to compare progress primarily as they read assigned books. As children reread books of the same

title, they often engaged in talk for the sake of constructing text meaning. But, children did not talk to compare progress as they reread. When children read books of their choice that peers had not read, they shared opinions about the books with friends. However, this talk was limited to comments such as "it's good." In contrast, as children read books of the same title (either rereading or reading with friends), they shared and discussed opinions about books in depth. Children shared opinions by describing specific parts or characters that they liked or disliked, their opinions about illustrations, and links with other books they had read or heard about. Children shared text passages, discussed plot and characters, and socialized with one another across all silent reading tasks. Talking was one way the children formed a community, a group for talking, sharing books, and constructing text meanings.

Book Selection

The children also talked as they selected books. However, they talked to help them select books not only when they chose books in the library or the classroom, but also during "silent" reading and when they were writing. Children used one another's expertise about books and the knowledge of peers' preferences to select books. The end result of interaction in this context was to select a book, a concern of theirs that was ever present. The children constructed a series of tasks and talk around these tasks to help them select a book. Patterns of talk that occurred around tasks of book selection are presented in Table 3 below.

Insert Table 3 about here

The children talked among themselves as they browsed for books, read book

lists, card catalogs, and book jackets making the act of selecting a book a highly interactive, community-oriented endeavor. Talk around book selection involved sharing titles, opinions, interests, and text passages. Although the children shared opinions about books in all four contexts, shared opinions in the context of book selection included not only opinions, but also speculations about how their peers would like the book, an aspect of talk/opinion sharing absent in the contexts of silent reading, writing, and aesthetic activity. The presence of physical objects in the context of book selection such as book jackets, shelves of books, lists, and card catalogs prompted talk absent in the context of silent reading. The presence of these physical prompts lead children to share titles they had read, look at and discuss text length, share interests, and give book talks. Talk such as this did not occur in any other context. Talk helped the children select books that meet their needs as readers, as members of a peer group, and fulfill the teacher's requirements of the selection of a number of books from specific genres and/or from prepared lists of books.

Writing

Children had many opportunities for writing during the language arts block. Children's talk about writing was more contained within the activities of writing when compared to interactions in the other contexts. However, in the contexts of "silent" reading and book selection children in the study gave one another suggestions for reading informational texts to help one another complete writing assignments. Talk among the children occurred primarily when Ms. Reynolds held individual editing/writing conferences and occurred around specific writing tasks, much of which were reading. These are presented in Table 4 below.

Insert Table 4 about here

Ms. Reynolds frequently reprimanded children for reading too much or reading the "wrong" books and talking when they were to be writing. Her reprimands indicated that Ms. Reynolds valued silent acts of pencil movement and that she was unaware of the supportive nature of the children's talk in the context of writing. Talk revolved around various reading tasks intended to help children accomplish the end result of a final product and consisted of suggestions for editing, revision, sources of information, and opinions about books. Children shared processes, drafts, and passages. They read and wrote. As in the context of book selection, the presence of a physical object, in this context a child's draft, prompted talk. Talk focused on progress/process was present in the context of writing and similar to talk in the context of silent reading; children discussed their progress towards finishing a piece of writing much as they did when they read assigned books. In the context of writing, children shared text passages to share information with peers, not for enjoyment as the children did when they shared text passages in the context of silent reading. Talk, similar to that in the context of silent reading, also involved text meaning construction. However, conversation for the construction of text meaning in the context of writing was more heated, opinionated, and aimed towards one right meaning. This type of talk seemed to have occurred because of the writing assignments. Children wrote about texts and talked in order to get the meaning "right" so that their writing would reflect that "right" meaning. In contrast, text construction conversation in the context of silent reading was much more speculative; children were not as

concerned with coming up with a consensus about "the" meaning. Talk in the context of writing occurred primarily as children read and was characterized by a more purposeful goal towards a "right" meaning or writing sample.

Aesthetic Activity

Aesthetic activity was a fourth context for responding to books and other readers. Ms. Reynolds regularly assigned individual and group artistic or dramatic response activities (illustrations, drama activities, oral presentations, and projects). Aesthetic responses sometimes occurred spontaneously and simultaneously in other contexts as well. For some of the children, aesthetic activity was highly threatening because they did not perceive of themselves as very artistic, dramatic, talented, or comfortable with oral presentations. Thus, talk around aesthetic activity tasks was the most supportive and interactive and the least text-bound when compared to those of the other three school contexts. A summary of talk around task patterns is presented in Table 5 below.

Insert Table 5 about here

Although Ms. Reynolds stressed the importance of revisiting the book as the children prepared aesthetic products, they rarely referred to texts during such activity. For example, as they talked to construct text meaning in the context of aesthetic activity, the children did not refer to books as they did in the contexts of writing and silent reading. Further, in this context, the children were not concerned with gaining a consensus of one right meaning. Discussions pertaining to text meaning construction were characterized by a flow of ideas and speculations that peers readily accepted and rarely

questioned. Children also discussed processes in the context of aesthetic activity. Although this type of talk was similar to process discussions in the context of writing, children were able to more elaborately discuss the more concrete processes of completing artistic projects. In contrast, children were less able to tell a friend how they wrote a piece. As the children illustrated, role played, dramatized, and discussed stories, they supported one another with positive feedback, encouragement, and community support more so than in any other language arts context.

The children interacted in subtly different ways specific to the four school contexts they constructed. The children talked as they read, selected books, wrote, and aesthetically responded to books. However, interaction among the children shaped not only the contexts, but also the children's perceptions of themselves as readers, their perceptions of texts, and can be seen in their responses to books and other readers. It was the children's perceptions of themselves as readers, their notions of texts, their role in the construction of contexts, and their interactions among themselves around these elements that shaped the community of readers. Four perspectives on this community are presented in the following passages and illustrate the variations in responses to books and other readers among the children.

Profiles of Example Case Readers

The interaction patterns in the four school contexts were shaped by children who had definite notions of themselves as readers and how to define and delineate among texts and genres. The elements of the community of readers--readers, texts, and contexts-presented in the following profiles of four readers were chosen from the four emic categories of reader perceptions that represented the community as a whole.

Clementine: "Not a good reader/Doesn't Like to Read"

Clementine was simultaneously shy and outgoing; she seemed to be taking this year in school to figure out who she was. Clementine rarely disrupted class and always appeared to be working on the tasks she was assigned. She seemed to enjoy reading, or at least not mind reading. However, Clementine told me a different story about herself as a reader. Clementine, like many of the children in the study who defined themselves as not liking to read or only sometimes enjoying reading, could not separate her perceptions of herself as a reader from her preferences for texts. Although she stated several times that she did not like to read, Clementine contradicted her expressed dislike for reading when she spoke of texts in our interview.

> C: I don't like reading a lot...I never liked to read...I usually don't read...The Cat Ate My Gymsuit (Danziger, 1974) I like that pretty much...We had it in the summer. And I liked that a lot. And I like books that are kinda, like just for girls. (Interview, 2/26)

Although I observed her interacting with 11 different texts during the course of the study, I think that Clementine's preference for "short books" drove many of her selections. For example, Clementine chose Gold Cadillac (Taylor, 1987) because it was a short book, and Clementine defined a "good book" as a "short book." Clementine also indicated a preference for books that have females as main characters. Of the 11 titles that I observed her interacting with or talking about, eight had female protagonists (e.g., Turn Homeward Hannalee, Beatty, 1984) and seven were contemporary realism (e.g., Blubber, Blume, 1986).

Clementine's way of talking about herself as a reader and her way of expressing her preferences for texts influenced how she interacted with texts and peers in the contexts of home and school. Good books were books to be

read at home, "okay" books at school. Clementine said,

> C: A good book, if it's real good, I usually read it at home...When it's an okay book I just read it during SSR [Sustained Silent Reading]. (Interview, 2/26)

When I talked to Clementine's mother, she also indicated that if Clementine was involved in a book, she read at home.

> C'S MOM: I think a lot of it is she's not really into what she's reading...I think if she were reading something that she was really interested in, she would pay attention and understand it, and she'd like it. (Interview, 3/30)

Clementine's perception of herself as a reader and her preferences for texts could be seen when she interacted with others during "silent" reading. The fieldnote excerpt below illustrates the social and cognitive nature of Clementine's and other children's interactions during "silent" reading.

> Clementine and Lane are sitting in their seats reading library books. Clementine begins a conversation with Lane and tells Lane, "Iggie's House (Blume, 1970) is a good book...I'm reading every word of it." (Fieldnotes, 2/1)

In this brief interaction Clementine shares her opinion about a book that fits her definition of "good": one that has female characters like her. She also reveals that she doesn't always read every word, but for this book she is.

Clementine's concept of herself as a reader, her preferences for texts, and her need for interaction with peers could also be seen in the context of book selection. I had observed her several times in the library hiding among the shelves with a friend and talking behind a book in the guise of reading. So, in our interview, I asked her about being in the library and selecting books. Clementine said,

> C: I usually don't read. I just talk and stuff. But I usually look for books...Lane tells me some books that she's read that are short and good... (Interview 2/26)

I also observed Clementine involved in several book talks, sharing texts and

opinions with peers, and browsing the shelves to select books.

Interestingly, Clementine, like others who defined themselves as not liking to read, enjoyed writing. She said,

> C: I like writing lab pretty much. It's fun...I just like writing stories and stuff. I used to always do it when I was little. So, I just kinda like it. (Interview, 2/26)

Clementine's writing folder revealed that she did indeed produce many pieces. In addition to the responses she wrote in her journal, Clementine wrote 15 separate writing pieces ranging from an assigned persuasive speech arguing for the right to wear shorts to school to several drafts of a recipe for marshmallow fudge. Interaction with peers during writing was evident in Clementine's drafts, many of which included happy or sad faces with comments written by a peer. She explained this in our interview,

> C:...[In conferences] we usually, like, give each other pointers, and we correct 'em, and what we do if it's my piece, we put what's good about it and put a happy face on it, and we put what we can improve, and sometimes we just sorta put ideas on it and like how we could make it better...I get new ideas and, like, she kinda edits for me, and so that helps. (Interview, 2/26)

Clementine's final copies were directly affected by her peers' comments and showed evidence of the revision and editing that they suggested.

Clementine, like other children in the study, did not speak of the projects and activities that I have termed "aesthetic activity" in our interviews. Although she participated in these activities, she did not participate enthusiastically. For example, when the children finished reading A Day No Pigs Would Die (Peck, 1972), they dramatized a scene from each chapter. Clementine, who expressed her dislike for this book, chose to be Pinky the pig for her group's scene. Her level of participation in this activity exemplifies what Clementine generally did during aesthetic activity:

> The children stand as an audience in the center of the room. It is very quiet. Clementine, Eric, Bob, and Chris are presenting "The Weaseling." They each play a character. They are using exaggerated facial expressions, body language, and accents in their speech. Clementine is playing Pinky the pig. She stands quietly and does nothing different. She does not squeal, bend over, or act like a pig in any way. (Fieldnotes, 3/1)

Clementine's perceptions of herself as a reader, her concepts about and preferences for texts, and her patterns of interaction in the contexts of the language arts block were evident in her participation in this community of readers. Clementine's perceptions of herself and of text were shaped by her interaction with peers and texts, and in turn she helped to shape the nature of the classroom contexts by her interaction with peers and texts.

Bob: "Pretty Good Reader/Sometimes Likes to Read"

Bob, an outgoing and athletic child, was a leader among the males in the class. He described himself as a reader who likes to read sometimes; for Bob "sometimes" meant the times when he read a book he liked. Bob, like Clementine, also used rate and amount to support his way of describing himself as a reader. Bob's perception of himself as a reader could not be separated from his perceptions of and preferences for texts. He spoke of this in our interview:

> B: I only like it [reading] if I like the book I'm reading. Then I'll read a little more than I usually do. I read a lot when I don't...have much else to do...I'm a pretty good reader, but it's not my favorite thing to do...Unless I have a really good book that I like. (Interview, 2/26)

Bob's preferences for texts influenced, naturally, the books that he chose to read. In our interview Bob told me he enjoyed mystery and adventure books. I observed him reading or interacting with seven texts during the course of the study. Four of those texts could be classified as adventure books [i.e., The Black Pearl (O'Dell, 1967) and Sign of the Beaver (Speare,

1983)]. Bob also read a mystery (Foxman, Paulsen, 1990) and two contemporary realism books (e.g., After the Goatman, Byars, 1974). Bob's concept of himself as a reader and his text preferences influenced how he interacted with his peers in the contexts of language arts. Bob enjoyed the class reading of A Day No Pigs Would Die (Peck, 1972) and used "silent" reading to discuss plot and characters with a friend.

> Bob and Peter sit at their desks reading A Day No Pigs Would Die. Bob turns to Peter and asks, "What do you think will happen next? I think he's gonna die."
> Peter replies, "I think he's going to have to kill Pinky because she's barren."
> The two continue to discuss whether or not Pinky will die. (Fieldnotes, 2/26)

Bob was involved with meaning making with a friend during "silent" reading.

Book selection was a time for social interaction for Bob. He was not concerned with finding a "good book." In our interview Bob explained:

> B: I don't like to read a lot, so I saw that it [Blind Outlaw (Rounds, 1980)] was pretty short and I picked it...When I go to the library we usually don't read a lot. I'm usually walking around looking for books and stuff like that...talking and walking around. (Interview, 2/26)

Bob was, however, interested in what specific books and the length of the books his friends were choosing. There was an acceptable level of text length and a group of acceptable titles for the males in Bob's peer group. They tried to select a book that was short and represented a "male" point of view. Further, Bob and his friends interacted with one another in the context of book selection to check and approve one another's titles.

> Peter, William, Marcus, and Bob are in the library browsing the shelves together. Luke joins them. They are not talking. They are selecting a book from the shelf, showing one another titles. When one of them shares the cover of a book, the others either nod or shake their heads. They continue to wander the shelves in the library selecting a book. Peter checks out his book and goes to the steps to read. Bob and William check out their book and join Peter at the steps. They begin talking quietly with their books closed. (Fieldnotes, 1/24)

The influence of the children's peers upon book selection as well as the social nature of this context is evident in this excerpt from fieldnotes.

Bob did not interact with other children in the context of writing. In our interview he said, "I don't really like to write a lot." Bob's dislike of writing affected his patterns of interaction during writing. He often disrupted class during this time or wandered the room reading what other children had written. Bob did, however, complete all assigned reading journal entries and 14 writing pieces throughout the course of the study. Bob's journal entries were written summaries of chapters with little opinion or reflection. For example, Bob wrote about The Outsiders (Hinton, 1967),

> In these chapters (11-12) Pony is still sick, Randy comes to see him and remind him about the hearing...Pony decided he'd better start doing his theme he had to do because he was making a D in english. I really liked the way the book ended. (Response Journal)

Bob's choice of writing topics, too, reflected his interests; for example, his persuasive speech argued against instant replay in the NFL. Bob wrote fewer drafts than Clementine, who enjoyed writing. Although his drafts do show evidence of peer editing marks, Bob relied primarily on Ms. Reynolds for editing. Interestingly, Bob's most frequently used writing format was cinquain. His writing folder included 16 poems, many of which were about sports:

> Baseball
> Steal, Catch
> Round the Bases
> Hit a Home Run
> Smashing!
> (Writing Folder)

Bob claimed to not like writing and may have chosen to write cinquains because they are short.

Bob did enjoy and enthusiastically involve himself in aesthetic response

activities in the classroom. For Bob, aesthetic activity was a time to discuss process and share what he had completed with his peers. The excerpt from fieldnotes below illustrates Bob's enthusiasm in the context of aesthetic activity.

> The children are talking about what they are going to wear for Zeus's birthday party [they are to dress as a Greek God or Goddess]...Bob is discussing his costume with William and tells him, "My Mom's going to make me a toga." Bob, William, and Rick discuss what togas look like and the sheets that they will need to get. They begin talking about headdresses and colors that they will need. The boys discuss wearing helmets, crowns, fig leaves, and laurel leaves, and whether or not they will wear red, gold, white, or purple. They discuss where to get swords and shields to make sure that don't have "girl togas." (Fieldnotes, 1/29)

Bob's dislike of writing and text-bound perceptions of himself as a reader influenced how he interacted with others in the contexts of language arts, and interaction with peers in during language arts influenced how Bob perceived of himself as a reader and what he thought about books.

Peter: "Pretty Good Reader/Likes to Read"

Peter, a shy child who blushed readily, did not seem to know that he was a leader among the males in the classroom. He was very sensitive and became highly interested in the war in the Gulf and spent much of his writing time reading news magazines and sharing information from them with his friends. He, too, described himself as a reader in terms of rate and amount that he read. Peter said,

> P: I read pretty fast...I like to read periodicals. I like to read magazines. I read pretty much. And during the daytime on Saturdays when it's raining and stuff...I like to read. (Interview, 2/5)

Peter did read at school and according to his mother, Peter read at home.

> P'S MOM: He reads the sports in the paper constantly...he really reads as much as you or I would...He reads for pure enjoyment, and I think he always will. (Interview 3/19)

I would have described Peter as a great reader. However, his concept of himself as a "pretty good reader" seemed to have an effect on his selection of books and how he interacted with his peers in the contexts of language arts.

Like Bob and many of the other males in the classroom, Peter told me he liked reading mysteries and adventures; but, I observed him reading or interacting with 18 texts from a variety of genres during the course of the study. For example, Peter read Cheaper by the Dozen (Gibreth & Carey, 1963), The Slave Dancer (Fox, 1973), Partners in Crime (Christie, 1971), I Robot (Asimov, 1956), and Tracker (Paulsen, 1984). Unlike Clementine and Bob, Peter did not limit himself to his stated text preferences, adventure and mystery stories.

During "silent" reading Peter rarely interacted with peers. When Peter did choose to talk during "silent" reading, he generally discussed characters or plot as in the interchange with Bob concerning A Day No Pigs Would Die (Peck, 1972). Peter did share his text selections and opinions about books with others in the typically brief and furtive manner that characterized interactions among the children during "silent" reading.

> Peter has chosen Shadow of a Bull (Wojciechowska, 1964) from the classroom library. On his way back to his seat, Peter stops by Bob's desk and shows him the cover of the book and says, "This is a good book." Peter returns to his seat and begins reading. (Fieldnotes, 1/17)

The excerpt taken from fieldnotes above illustrates the connected nature of the contexts of "silent" reading and book selection. Unlike Bob, who was primarily concerned with selecting a short book that meet his male peer group's criteria of a good selection, Peter was concerned with selecting books that he thought he would enjoy. He also wanted to be accepted by his peers and did indeed share those selections with them.

Peter expressed his dislike for writing in our interview, "I don't like writing...I don't like writing in my reading log. I just don't like writing in general." As a writer, Peter was constrained by Ms. Reynolds' insistence on adhering to the processes of writing in a linear fashion. Peter's writing folder shows little evidence of drafting, revision, and editing. Peter did, however, edit and revise short pieces, such as cinquains. Editing sessions such as these became joyful, play-like situations in which many of the children joined in. In the fieldnote excerpt below, the children play with words as they help Peter write a cinquain.

> Peter is writing a cinquain for his Secret Pal...he looks up some words in a thesaurus and doesn't seem to be satisfied. He asks his friends at his table for help. The children begin brainstorming words that begin with certain letters. They are laughing and calling out words to him: "yokel," "raunchy," "knave." (Fieldnotes 12/13)

When Peter wrote his persuasive speech, he thought and read as he rehearsed for writing. This caused some problems for Peter. Ms. Reynolds was unhappy with Peter's lack of progress on his speech. Peter was reprimanded for reading during writing time. Despite the situation, Peter risked his popular status among his friends by being the only child to denounce the war in the Gulf in his speech. Peter did not file his eloquent speech in his writing folder, but rather read from notecards that he later discarded. Ms. Reynolds evaluated his speech as an A- and wrote the comment, "Please use your writing time more wisely" on his evaluation form.

In our interview, Peter did not refer to the various projects that the students completed to respond to books aesthetically. I observed Peter's lack of enthusiasm and low-key participation in the context of aesthetic activity. He seemed more concerned with a deeper construction of text-meaning than he did with participating in activities that extended the text. As the children

worked on maps of the Greek cosmos, several of them shared and compared their maps.

> The children are working on maps of the Greek mythological underworld. They are sharing their drawings with one another, sharing color ideas, and talking quietly as they work...Tyler goes to Peter's desk and shows him his drawing. Tyler laughs and says, "It's a happy place."
> Peter asks him, "What does Tartarus look like? Isn't it gloomy?"
> Tyler replies, "I don't know, I thought it was happy."
> Peter shrugs and continues drawing with dark colors. (Fieldnotes, 1/2)

This pattern of interaction was typical of Peter and other children in the context of aesthetic activity. Text meaning was constructed without reference to text and by sharing of products and ideas.

Peter's concept of himself as a reader, his preferences for texts, and how he interacted with his peers in the contexts of language arts influenced the nature of the contexts. Interactions in the contexts of language arts also had an affect on Peter's concept of himself as a reader and writer.

Erin: "Good Reader/Likes to Read"

Erin was a confident child who readily expressed herself and what she thought about books and language arts. She was a leader among the females in the classroom, and her text preferences influenced what several of the other girls in the study read. Erin shared her opinions about texts with her friends, and they often looked to her for ideas for books to read. Being the female leader had disadvantages for Erin; she was often reprimanded for talking during language arts.

Erin thought of herself as a good reader. In our interview, she said,

> E: I like to read...I like reading all sorts of books. I like reading short books to my sister, medium books before I go to bed, and hard...not hard but on my level, when I'm reading. (Interview, 2/28)

I observed Erin reading and enjoying books at school. Her mother told me that she also read at home.

> E'S MOM: She reads everyday...and she has gotten so in the evenings she'll read every night. I mean, she reads herself to sleep. (Interview, 3/19)

Erin liked a variety of texts. Unlike Clementine and others in the classroom, Erin did not limit her selection of texts by their length. However, like Clementine, Erin too expressed a preference for books that had characters that were similar to her in age and gender.

> E: I mean, they're [characters in books she likes] like me...I like books that are about things I know about...I like books about my age. (Interview, 2/28)

During the course of the study, Erin read or referred to 22 different texts. The majority of these were contemporary realism, many of which had strong female characters (e.g., Bridge to Terabithia, Paterson, 1977). She also read several fantasy novels including Stuart Little (White, 1945) and four books by Roald Dahl.

Like all of the children in the study, Erin interacted with peers in the context of "silent" reading. Her patterns of interaction were similar to those of Peter; Erin shared her opinions about books and interacted with friends to construct text meaning.

> Erin and Kelly are sitting at the back table with The Outsiders (Hinton, 1967) open. They are discussing the murder scene and referring to the book as they read one another passages. (Fieldnotes, 11/28)

This excerpt from the fieldnotes illustrates a typical pattern of interaction during "silent" reading. The children in the study often discussed text meaning in the context of "silent" reading.

Erin also interacted with friends in the context of book selection. She used her friends' knowledge about books to help her select a text that she would enjoy reading. In our interview Erin told me about how she selects books,

> E: I like to ask people what a good book is...I don't like books that I check out myself; it's usually what others recommend...They know what I like, and if I've never read it before...And we read a lot of the same books. And then all my friends read 'em. (Interview, 2/28)

There were gender differences in the influence of peers upon book selection. Males wanted and sought out approval from their male friends for the books they selected and were concerned with length and topic, but the females were more concerned with selecting a book that they would enjoy reading. Interactions among females in the context of book selection shaped this context into a female "support group" for choosing a book. The females spent more time giving one another book talks, discussing characters and plot, and sharing "good books."

Erin also interacted with peers in the context of writing. She expressed her difficulty with writing at school and thinking up topic ideas without the help of her friends.

> E: I do most of my writing at home...I can't work in writing lab because I can't think around other people...I get most of my ideas in the shower...I had trouble writing my myth...Ms. Reynolds was mad at me for not thinking of anything, but I wanted to have a good myth 'cause I like doing that. But it was just hard to think. And I ended up figuring it out...I mean, it took me five periods to figure something out. (Interview, 2/28)

Erin's words express the conflict between the needs of the student-writer and the agenda of Ms. Reynolds that often occurred in the context of writing. Peter experienced this conflict as well. Interestingly, neither Peter nor Erin interacted with friends as frequently during writing as many other children did, Clementine for example. However, Erin did help other children revise and edit when they requested.

> Erin and Rick are sitting at the table writing. Rick looks up from his work and asks Erin for "a word that goes with basketball and starts with 'L'."
> Erin thinks for a while and says, "Layup." (Fieldnotes, 1/11)

Unlike several of the children in the study, Erin rarely referred to her text when writing responses. She used her response journal, as she did in the following response to A Day No Pigs Would Die (Peck, 1972), to speculate about plot and characters rather than summarize plots.

> February 13 Who was that baby that they dug up? I don't understand this chapter at all?...Who are the Hillman's?...I wonder who is Letty Phelps, was it night when they went to town. Now I understand Sebring-May were married and Sebring had an affair with Letty and they had a baby...(Response Journal)

Erin's concepts of herself as a reader and writer influenced the manner in which she chose to interact or not with her peers in the context of writing.

In the context of aesthetic activity, Erin playfully interacted with the children in the study. She seemed use this time to respond to other readers and go beyond the texts. In the excerpt from fieldnotes below, Erin shared with her peers her role in the celebration of Greek mythology.

> The children are drawing names for who will represent which god/goddess the activity. They are discussing what they will wear to represent themselves as a god/ess...Erin draws Medusa and shares this excitedly with the class. She and several of her peers laugh. Bob calls out, "You won't have to wear a wig."
> Erin's face turns bright red. She laughs and replies, "No, I just won't blow dry my hair." (Fieldnotes, 1/24)

Situations such as this occurred frequently in this middle school classroom. Erin did not show her embarrassment and managed to save face in this situation. In instances such as these, aesthetic activity became a somewhat threatening context for the children in the study.

Erin's perceptions of herself as a reader, her preferences for texts, and the manner in which she interacted with her peers in the contexts of language arts helped shaped the nature of the classroom community. Conversely, Erin's participation through interactions in the contexts of the classroom influenced the ways in which she perceived herself as a reader and

her preferences for texts.

SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION

Ms. Reynolds and all of the children played a role in creating a community of readers. Ms. Reynolds had high expectations for the children as readers and writers. She loved children's literature, had a large and varied classroom library, and demanded excellence in her students' writing and text selections. Ms. Reynolds planned integrated reading and writing activities from a process-oriented perspective. Although she allowed children to talk only during peer writing conferences, her activities provided the children with a framework for interaction. Talk among the children in the study influenced how they viewed themselves as readers, their text preferences, the nature of classroom contexts, and how they responded to books orally and through writing.

Prior research investigating the influence of reader factors to responses to literature has had a focus on the developmental aspects of children's responses to literature (e.g., Applebee, 1978). Categories of readers, such as "avid," "lukewarm," and "nonreader," have been identified through high school and college age reader-autobiographies (Cope, 1990; Sherrill, 1981; Shiring, 1986). However, there are few, if any, research connections between readers' concepts of themselves as readers and how they respond to books through book selection, conversation, and writing. Children in this study defined themselves in four emic categories: 1.) Not a Good Reader/Doesn't Like to Read; 2.) Pretty Good Reader/Sometimes Likes to Read; 3.) Pretty Good Reader/Likes to Read; 4.) Good Reader/Likes to Read. The way in which the children in this study viewed themselves as readers affected what books they selected, their written responses to books, and how they

orally responded to books and one another. Clementine, for example, defined herself as "not a good reader," talked to her friends to find out about "short books," and halfheartedly responded to books in her journal and through dramatic activities. Perhaps her background, expectations, personality, and interaction in a community of readers affected her responses to literature and her peers as much as her age/maturation level.

Currently, there are two areas of research on the influence of text features upon children's responses to literature: studies of the influences of specific text features on response to literature (e.g., Galda, 1982), and studies of children's text preferences (e.g., Purves & Beach, 1976). However, the influence of children's concepts of themselves as readers and their perceptions of and preferences for text on their responses to literature has not been investigated. Children in this study had preferences for and ways of delineating among texts; self-selected texts evoked the strongest responses and in turn, influenced how they defined themselves as readers. Good books were different for different readers. Experiences with these "good books" influenced their concepts about themselves as readers. For example, Peter, who defined himself as a "pretty good reader/likes to read" did not limit his selection of texts to specific genres or length. However, when he read books he selected, Peter was more likely to involve himself in conversations geared towards the construction of text meanings. Bob, on the other hand, who described himself as a "pretty good reader/sometimes likes to read" liked to read sometimes--meaning when he found a text he liked. Bob rarely responded to books orally, wrote summary responses, and searched for books that were short. Their stories lead me to believe that these children's experiences with particular books influenced the types of books they preferred and

selected to read, how they responded to books, and their concepts about themselves as readers.

The influence of context on children's responses to literature has been well established. Talk helps children construct text meaning (e.g., Eeds & Wells, 1989; Hepler & Hickman, 1982), select books (e.g., Hepler & Hickman, 1982), select writing topics, revise, and edit writing (e.g., McClure, 1985). Oral responses among the children in this study were strikingly similar to those reported in previous studies of the classroom as a context for responding to books. As has been reported in previous studies, the children in this study talked to share texts and opinions, select books, construct text meanings, play with words, revise, edit, and discuss processes. Although the teacher allowed talking only during peer conferences, children added talk to the particular tasks they perceived would help them read and write. They interacted in patterns that transcended blocks of time, rules, or assignments. Children's talk occurred around tasks specific to overlapping, simultaneously-occurring contexts of silent reading, book selection, writing, and aesthetic activity. Thus, contexts were interactional frames, not instructional frames. For example, in the context of writing, children reread their own, peers', and professionally published texts. As they reread books to write three patterns of interaction occurred: children shared these texts with peers; they constructed text meanings through conversation; and they talked socially. They established what Hepler (1991) describes as an "information network."

A Grounded Theory of the Community of Readers

The children's perceptions of themselves as readers, their perceptions of and preferences for texts, and their context-specific patterns of interaction all influenced the children's responses, in turn shaping a

community of readers. Conversely, the children interacted in the community they created which, in turn, influenced their notions of themselves as readers, their concepts about texts, their context-specific interaction patterns, and how they responded to books and peers orally and through writing. For example, consider Erin, who defined herself as a good reader, in the context of book selection. Erin enjoyed reading books that were "like her," and she shared her ideas about books with her peers in the overlapping contexts of silent reading, book selection, writing, and aesthetic activity. Her peers read books she suggested. She and her friends discussed text preferences, constructed text meanings, and shared opinions as they interacted during language arts. These interactions seemed to affirm her positive feelings about herself as a reader, helped her construct text meaning, and gave her ideas for reading more books. Her talk added to her peers' knowledge about Erin as a reader, about Erin's perceptions of books, and helped her peers construct text meaning. Further, Erin's ways of talking about books influenced the manner in which her peers responded orally to books. Erin's concepts about herself as a reader and her text preferences were evident in her interactions with her peers, were shaped by her interactions with her peers, and influenced her peers' concepts about themselves as readers, texts, and their responses in contexts. Further, Erin's ideas were shaped through interaction in the community, and Erin's interaction in the community shaped the community.

The model below is intended to graphically represent readers' written and oral responses in this community of readers. Under symbolic interactionism the elements of community, readers, texts, and contexts become realities constructed by interaction. The significance and meanings of these

elements--community, readers, texts, and contexts--were created through social interaction, shared by members of the same group, and guided interaction and interpretation. Responses to literature, or evocations of poems in Rosenblatt's words, occurred as the shared, created-realities of readers, texts, and contexts interacted in a socially-constructed community of readers. Thus, although poems may be shared, they were also individual; under this grounded theory, the poem, too, became a community-based, created reality.

Insert Figure 1 about here

To illustrate consider Peter, a reader who defined himself as a pretty good reader/likes to read. He had specific notions of texts, had particular ways of interacting with his peers in the contexts they created, and was a member of the community in which he helped create. He read a text in the context of silent reading. In the model above "Reader" represents Peter's concepts of himself as a reader, his background, his expectations, his prior experience with books, his preferences for texts, and his personality. Under symbolic interactionism the meaning of a text is a shared and social reality. "Text" represents the physical object made live by Peter's transaction with that text and influenced by Peter's membership and interaction in the community. This circle in the model includes all of the features of the text that Peter may find lend it a "good book." "Context" represents the range of interaction patterns and situations under which Peter and his book meet. Context has significance because the group created its meaning through interaction. "Community" is superimposed upon the elements of reader, text,

and context because it is the within this broader, social entity that these elements came together. Community, too, was created through interaction among its members. "Poems" represent the range of responses to books and other readers found in the study and observed through children's book selections, conversations about books, written responses, interaction patterns, and aesthetic responses to books. The evocation of the poem occurred as Peter read a book in contexts contained in the community he helped create. Peter's poem was influenced by his concept of himself as a reader (readers), his preferences for and perceptions of texts (texts), his roles and concepts of the context in which he read (contexts), and his membership in a community of readers.

Clementine too, was a reader and a member of the community she helped shape. For the purpose of example, Clementine read the same book as Peter in the context of silent reading. However, Clementine had a different concept of herself as a reader, different notions of texts, and, unlike Peter, often interacted with peers in the context of silent reading. Clementine's poem, like Peter's, was influenced by her concept of herself as a reader (readers), her preferences for and perceptions of texts (texts), her roles and concepts of the context in which she read (contexts), and her membership in the community (community). Clementine evoked a different poem. Clementine's poem was different and will always be different because even if all other elements could be held constant, she was a different reader.

DISCUSSION

This study was intended to describe a community from the perspective of the children. It could be argued that although the children acted as participant/informants in the study, this study is not from their perspective.

However, I argue that the study is grounded in the perspectives of the children and represents a picture of a community they created. I believe we can learn much from their story.

Perhaps most important to me, I learned from this study that children's talk can override and compensate for constraining classroom situations. I think back to my traditional classroom and the children that struggled under my "no talking" rules. I see myself in Ms. Reynolds. She, like me, thought that children could learn more from her than from each other. The children in this study learned much from her, and they learned from each other.

What is the significance of this study and can it tell us something about children reading, writing, and responding to books? As I struggle to teach graduate students "how to teach reading," I try to think of teaching reading from a response-based paradigm, and I turn to the sixth-graders of Athens Academy and Ms. Reynolds for reference. I believe that the four elements that influenced the "poems" in this classroom are vitally important.

I believe we must honor and respect our readers. We must believe in them, honor and respect their backgrounds and personalities, listen to their opinions, provide them with encouragement, and give them opportunities to make choices concerning the books they read and how they respond to those books. We must help them to find that one magic book that hooks them as a lifelong reader. Ms. Reynolds did this. She never gave up on those children who defined themselves as not liking to read or liking to read sometimes. She had a vast knowledge of children's literature, gave children suggestions, and encouraged them to read.

I believe that readers need experiences with "good books." Eeds and Wells (1989) write that provocative books give children avenues for rich

discussions. Ms. Reynolds had a huge and varied classroom library. Children in the study browsed the classroom library daily and took weekly trips to the library where they talked about books, selected books, and read. I learned from the children in this study that a "good book" is often a book of their choice or a book talked about by their peers. However, I do believe children need to be encouraged to read unfamiliar books. We need to encourage children to read from all genres of literature. If, for example, Bob never reads a science fiction book how will he know if he likes science fiction? Fortunately, the inclusion of texts in a response-based paradigm for teaching is somewhat in the hands of the educator.

I learned from this study that contexts for responding to literature are shaped by teachers and children. Several factors influence classroom contexts: assignments, time, rules for interaction, and choice. I learned that assignments are viewed differently by teachers and children. Practitioner journals advocate dramatic and artistic modes of responding to literature. I learned of the threatening nature of role playing, illustration, and oral presentation from the children in this study. I don't think that Ms. Reynolds was aware of how intimidated many of her students were when responding in these modes. I believe that she thought of these forms of response as they are described in the journals---fun ways of celebrating books and constructing meaning. Many of her students did not view these activities in this way. Assignments seem to me most meaningful when they are meaningful to the people completing them. I also learned that children in this study needed time--time to read, think, select topics, talk among themselves, and write. Contexts for responding to literature should include time and rules for, rather than against, talk. Children in this study learned much through

talk among their peers. Contexts that promote responding to literature should also include choices: choices for writing topics, books, and modes of responding to books. Contexts for responding to literature can be either constraining or freeing. Fortunately, adult facilitators have some control over contexts.

Perhaps the most important piece in this puzzle of response that I learned through this study was the importance of community. Communities are spatial and temporal boundaries created by people as they interact. They are entities where teachers and children can come together, support one another, learn from one another, negotiate curriculum, have thoughts and ideas listened to and respected, and grow as readers, writers, thinkers, and learners. It is within the boundaries of communities that readers grow as readers, experience and interpret a variety of texts in non-threatening situations, and create contexts that are supportive of their modes of responding to books and other readers. Like contexts, communities too may be constraining or freeing. How can we help create freeing, thoughtful communities? I believe that trust in ourselves as teachers and our children as learners may be the first step towards empowering both ourselves and our learners to break the often false and dichotomous boundaries of teacher-student. Perhaps we may begin this by thinking of our classrooms as communities, of ourselves as shapers of communities, and of our students as thoughtful members of a community that talk and read and write for real purposes that should be valued and celebrated.

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Table 1

Interaction Patterns by School Context

Silent Reading	Book Selection	Writing	Aesthetic Activity
Compared Progress		Shared Process	Discussed Processes
Discussed Characters	Discussed Text Length	Gave Editing Suggestions	Discussed Activities
Discussed Plot	Shared Titles Read	Role Played	Gave Feedback
Shared Text Passages	Shared Interests	Shared Texts	Shared Opinions
Shared Opinions	Shared Opinions	Shared Drafts	Shared Products
Constructed Text Meanings	Gave Book Talks	Constructed Text Meanings	Constructed Text Meanings
Socialized	Socialized	Socialized	Socialized

Table 2

Tasks and Talk Around "Silent Reading"

Tasks	Talk Likely to Occur
Read Assigned Texts	Compared Progress, Discussed Characters, Discussed Plot, Shared Text Passages, Shared Opinions, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Read with Friends	Compared Progress, Discussed Characters, Discussed Plot, Shared Text Passages, Shared Opinions, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Read Books of Choice	Compared Progress, Discussed Characters, Discussed Plot, Shared Text Passages, Socialized
Reread	Discussed Characters, Discussed Plot, Shared Text Passages, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized

Table 3

Tasks and Talk Around Book Selection

Task	Talk Likely to Occur
Used Lists	Discussed Text Length, Shared Titles Read, Shared Opinions, Gave Book Talks, Socialized
Read Book Jackets	Discussed Text Length, Shared Titles Read, Shared Opinions, Gave Book Talks, Socialized
Used Card Catalogs	Shared Titles Read, Shared Interests, Shared Opinions, Socialized
Browsed Shelves	Discussed Text Length, Shared Titles Read, Shared Opinions, Gave Book Talk, Socialized

Table 4

Tasks and Talk Around Writing

Task	Talk Likely to Occur
Read Drafts	Shared Processes, Gave Editing Suggestions, Role Played, Shared Texts, Shared Drafts, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Read Examples	Shared Process, Shared Drafts, Constructed Text Meanings
Read Texts	Role Played, Shared Texts, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Reread Texts	Shared Texts, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Read for Orientation	Shared Process, Gave Editing Suggestions, Shared Drafts, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Read for Revision	Shared Process, Gave Editing Suggestions, Shared Text, Shared Drafts, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Read Reference Sources	Shared Process, Shared Text, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Read Computer Screens	Shared Process, Gave Editing Suggestions, Shared Drafts, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Read Orally	Gave Editing Suggestions, Shared Drafts, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Wrote	Shared Process, Gave Editing Suggestions, Role Played, Shared Texts, Shared Drafts, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized

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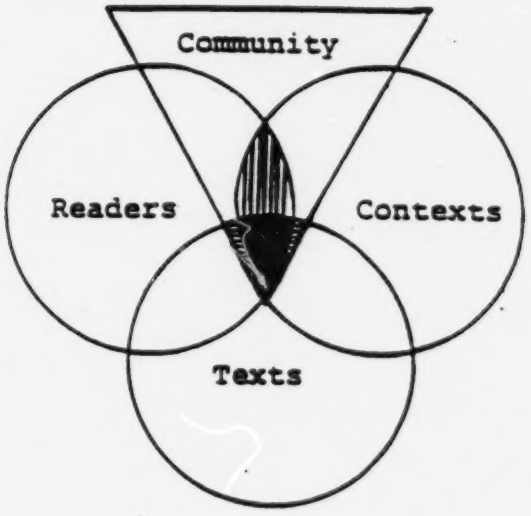
Table 5

Tasks and Talk Around Aesthetic Activity

Tasks	Talk Likely to Occur
Illustrated	Discussed Processes, Discussed Activities, Gave Feedback, Shared Opinions, Shared Products, Socialized
Planned Drama	Discussed Processes, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Dramatized Stories	Gave Feedback, Shared Opinions, Socialized
Discussed Text	Shared Opinions, Constructed Text Meanings, Socialized
Used Examples for Ideas	Discussed Processes, Discussed Activities, Shared Opinions, Socialized
Practiced	Discussed Processes, Discussed Activities, Gave Feedback, Shared Opinions, Socialized
Role Played	Gave Feedback, Shared Opinions, Socialized
Presented	Gave Feedback, Shared Opinions, Shared Products, Constructed Text Meanings

Figure 1. The "evocation of poems" in a community of readers.



LEGEND:

-Interaction Among Readers in Community-Based Contexts

-Readers and Texts in Emically Defined Contexts

-The "Poem" (Rosenblatt, 1978)

[The shapes of the model presented above were adapted from Purves (1985) with help from Lee Galda and Carol Fisher]